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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the influence that multicultural infusion would have on preservice teachers in an educational psychology course. Eight educational psychology classes at the same university participated in research to assess preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching African American students. All classes were taught by teaching assistants. One class was geared toward infusing multiculturalism into the course. Five additional classes were taught by teaching assistants who were participating in a collaborative project to support student-centered teaching. Two of the teaching assistants did not participate in the collaborative project. The Teaching African American Students Survey was administered the last 2 weeks of the semester by the course instructors. Participants within the class that was exposed to multicultural infusion obtained the highest scores on the Teaching African American Students Survey subscales. An ANOVA (alpha=.05) was conducted to determine if the mean scores on the two subscales were statistically different for the classes. Results revealed that differences in scores on the willingness subscale were not statistically significant. However, differences on the cultural sensitivity subscale were statistically significant. (Contains 13 references.) (Author/SM)

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Infusing Multiculturalism into Educational Psychology:

Influence on Preservice Teachers' Attitudes toward

Teaching African American Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the influence that multicultural infusion would have on preservice teachers in an educational psychology course. Eight educational psychology classes at the same university participated in research to assess preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching African American students. All classes were taught by Teaching Assistants. One class was geared toward infusing multiculturalism into the course. Five additional classes were taught by Teaching Assistants who were participating in a collaborative project to support student-centered teaching. Two of the Teaching Assistants did not participate in the collaborative project. The Teaching African American Student Survey was administered the last two weeks of the semester by the course instructors. Participants within the class that was exposed to multicultural infusion obtained the highest scores on the Teaching African American Students Survey sub-scales. An ANOVA (alpha = .05) was conducted to determine if the mean scores on the two sub-scales were statistically different for the classes. Results revealed that differences in scores on the Willingness sub-scale were not statistically significant, $F(7,105) = .975$, $p = .454$. However, differences on the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale were statistically significant, $F(7,105) = 3.173$, $p = .004$.

Research findings indicate that many inservice and preservice teachers do not hold positive attitudes toward teaching African American students (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Wiggins & Follo, 1999). As a result, scholars of teacher education are advocating that preservice teachers reflect on their attitudes toward race as an aspect of the teacher preparation curriculum (Gay, 1997; Hilliard, 1995; Wiggins & Follo, 1999; Zeichner, 1996). Thus far, attempts at reflections on race have taken a variety of forms in the curriculum. Multicultural courses, urban field experiences, and infusion of multiculturalism throughout the curriculum are just a few reported efforts to address preservice teachers' attitudes about race. Unfortunately, multicultural teacher education has generally operated out of a myopic perspective that there is one multicultural entity, which if it is addressed in education, will result in the better education of all cultural groups. When cultural is ignored, or is addressed too broadly, there is a denial of distinct cultural groups.

Most of the research in multicultural teacher education has focused on specific domains of teachers attitudes (e.g., efficacy) toward students in general. This research, however, explores preservice teachers' general attitudes toward a specific population of students. This research is a quest for teacher education to recognize more specific cultural issues in the exploration of preservice teachers' racial attitudes.

Multicultural Teacher Education

A review of the literature on multicultural teacher education reveals a general failure to facilitate preservice teachers' knowledge and understanding of the cultural influences on learning (Goodwin, 1997; Swartz, 1996). Preservice teachers have a tendency to interpret any behavior that is inconsistent with school cultural norms as a deficit, rather than critically thinking about the

relevance of those differences to learning outcomes. Preservice teachers are unlikely to consider how the behaviors may represent positive cultural adaptations, or how they, as teachers, may provoke negative actions.

This pattern of viewing differences as deficits was evident in a study of preservice teachers by Goodwin (1997), in which 75 preservice teachers wrote illustrations of personal experiences of multicultural issues or dilemmas during the first term of their student teaching. In analyzing their illustrations, Goodwin concluded that the student teachers focused on how the student could fit into the school environment. The idea of changing the school, or classroom, environment was not considered by the student teachers. The preservice teachers in this sample viewed the objective of multicultural teaching as helping diverse students assimilate.

Gormley, McDermott, Rothenberg, and Hammer (1995) found that the lack of depth of understanding about multicultural education was not even affected by teaching experience. In a study of expert and novice teachers, these researchers analyzed the attitudes of student teachers before and after their student teaching experience. Forty elementary student teachers and 26 cooperating teachers completed a questionnaire that contained two open-ended questions and 30 Likert-type items.

Results of the Gromley et. al (1995) study revealed that both cooperating teachers who had experience and the student teachers reflected a "surface" understanding about multicultural education. For example, both groups recognized that changing teaching methods might be appropriate for diverse children and that children do not always learn the same way. However, both groups also indicated uncertainty about whether they would change their methods, management style, or communication strategies to fit children's cultural backgrounds.

Wiggins and Follo (1999) also found that exposing preservice teachers to culturally different groups was not enough to alter negative attitudes. Through pre- and post-semester assessments using interviews and questionnaires, the researchers investigated the willingness and readiness of the 123 preservice teachers to teach in culturally diverse settings. Results revealed that the semester of field placement in diverse school settings and class time devoted to multicultural issues did not greatly impact students regarding their readiness to teach in multicultural classrooms. Although students generally found the experiences helpful, they had little effect on their comfort with cultures other than their own. Some of the students, in fact, experienced an adverse reaction to diverse cultural settings, and clung more adamantly to negative stereotypes.

Carrol (1999), found that preservice teachers were not prepared to deal with issues of racism in education. In her research using case studies, Carrol found that preservice teachers often did not recognize racism in the classroom. When preservice teachers in her study did recognize racism, they were reluctant to take action against it out of fear of retaliation by administrators or teachers.

The current research was expected to yield more positive results than those typically found in the literature for two reasons. First, the current research had congruency between curriculum emphasis and attitude assessment. There was an emphasis on African American culture in the experimental classroom. The assessment corresponded to that particular population as well. Previous research often focused on critical theory, social justice, or racism assessments, without evidence of congruence in the curriculum. Second, comparison groups were used to evaluate the influence of the multicultural infusion. Therefore, even though findings might suggest preservice

teachers do not have as positive attitudes as hoped for by teacher education scholars, comparison of class scores could provide a more optimistic picture about the influence of multicultural infusion.

Method

Ten Teaching Assistants were solicited to allow their students class time to participate in research about preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching African American students. All of the solicited TAs were teaching the required educational psychology course for preservice teachers. Eight TAs consented to participate in the research. Six of the eight consenting TAs were also part of an Educational Psychology Collaboration Project designed to enhance their student-centered approache to teaching. The project involved weekly meetings to discuss classroom activities, seek and offer advice, and collaborate on research related to teaching educational psychology. Two faculty members served as advisors to the collaboration project, and typically attended the meetings. The two TAs who were not part of the collaboration project were not questioned about their teaching methods. The average class size was 14 students.

Participants

One hundred and thirty-four preservice teachers participated in the research. Participants were enrolled in educational psychology courses reserved for preservice teachers and taught by Teaching Assistants. Only 113 participants completed the survey, and therefore were included in the data analysis. Ages of participants ranged from 19 to 25. No freshmen were enrolled in the educational psychology classes. Eight percent were graduate students; thirty-four percent were seniors; thirty-five percent were juniors, and twenty-three percent were sophomores. Fifty-two percent of the participants were pursuing elementary education licensure. Fifteen percent were

pursing K-12 licensure; thirteen percent were pursuing secondary licensure; twenty percent were pursing middle school licensure. Ninety-one percent of participants were European American. Seven percent were Hispanic American. One participant indicated African American for race, and one indicated "other" in the race category. Sixty-seven percent of the participants were female.

Infusion of Multiculturalism

The researcher specifically designed her course to infuse multiculturalism throughout the curriculum. The infusion of multiculuralism within the educational psychology course consisted of a constant reiteration of cultural influences on learning within almost every lesson. Class activities and discussions included topics about cultural influences on learning and cognition, learning styles, cognitive development, home vs. school environments, minorities and school failure, and culturally relevant pedagogies. The multicultural infusion emphasized African-American issues. However, conscious attempts were made to discuss Hispanic/Latino and Native American issues in the classroom because their school failure rates are similar to that of African-American students.

The traditional discussion of Piaget in educational psychology was extended to explore cross-cultural differences in child development. The discussion on learning theories included research related to learning styles of African American and other minority students. One of the assignments was for students to write a 5-page paper on their ideas about the influence of culture on learning.

An in-class writing assignment included a vignette about an African American student. The instructor read part of the story then paused for the students to write their assumptions about what happened next. After students wrote their responses, the instructor continued the story then

paused and repeated the process several times until she arrived at the end of the story where the student was successful. However, many of the students had predicted failure for the student several times based on assumptions they made about race or socioeconomic status. Assignments such as these were used to facilitate preservice teachers' reflection about race and education.

Students were also introduced to pedagogy, such as African-centered education (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994) and culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Preservice teachers were encouraged to develop a repertoire of pedagogical concepts and explanatory formulations to make sense of their encounters with culturally different students in a way that is culturally sensitive.

Teaching African American Students Survey

The Teaching African American Students Survey (TAASS) was still in its development stage by the researcher (Bakari, 1999). The purpose of the TAASS was to assess preservice teachers' general attitudes toward teaching African American students. Items written for the scale were based on a literature review on African American education. A review of the literature led to a blueprint for the survey based on the understanding that culture is an important consideration in teaching African American students effectively. One pilot study had been conducted with the TAASS to determine the factor structure of the scale (Bakari, 1999). Results indicated that two sub-scales best represented the factor structure: Willingness to Teach African American Students, and Cultural Sensitivity toward Teaching African American Students.

The 12-item Willingness sub-scale represents a disposition toward teaching African American students. However, it does not presume to measure a preference for teaching African American students. Reliability for the Willingness sub-scale in the pilot research was .88. The

9-item Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale is intended to capture the degree to which preservice teachers believe culture should be a consideration in educating African American children. Reliability for the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale was .72.

Procedure

The TAASS was administered in eight educational psychology classes in Spring 1999. Each instructor administered the survey in his or her own class during the last two weeks of the semester. Written instructors were provided to the instructors to administer the survey. If students asked for interpretation of any items on the survey instructors were requested to inform participants to use their best interpretation to answer all the items.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A statement was read aloud to the class to inform students of their rights to refuse participation without consequences. Participants were also requested to place their completed surveys in the envelop so as not to be seen by the instructor or anyone else. Students were permitted unlimited time to complete the survey. All surveys were completed within 20 minutes. Most were completed within ten minutes.

Results

Mean scores on the Willingness sub-scale ranged from 4.69 to 5.17 on a six-point scale. Mean scores on the Cultural Sensitivity ranged from 3.74 to 4.60. The mean score for the sample was 4.90 on the Willingness to Teach African American Students sub-scale, and 4.05 on the Cultural Sensitivity toward African American Students sub-scale. In Table 1 class scores are presented by instructors according to whether they participated in the collaboration project (Cohort), did not participate (independent), or infused multiculuralism into the course (infusion). The students in the class where multiculturalism was infused into the curriculum obtained higher

scores on both sub-scales of the TAASS. Reliability of the Willingness sub-scale was .84. Reliability of the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale was .80.

Table 1

Mean Scores by Class on Sub-Scales

INSTRUCT		Willing to Teach	Cultural Sensitivity
Cohort	Mean	4.8333	4.1000
	N	12	12
	Std. Deviation	.5774	.6396
Infusion	Mean	5.1704	4.6000
	N	15	15
	Std. Deviation	.4540	.4736
Independent	Mean	4.9242	3.7455
	N	22	22
	Std. Deviation	.6080	.8268
Cohort	Mean	4.8519	3.9333
	N	6	6
	Std. Deviation	.5243	.7763
Cohort	Mean	5.1481	4.0889
	N	9	9
	Std. Deviation	.5300	.6353
Independent	Mean	4.7843	3.7824
	N	17	17
	Std. Deviation	.7753	.6464
Cohort	Mean	4.6667	4.3867
	N	15	15
	Std. Deviation	.7990	.6812
Cohort	Mean	4.8954	3.8824
	N	17	17
	Std. Deviation	.6230	.6277
Total	Mean	4.9017	4.0451
	N	113	113
	Std. Deviation	.6372	.7185

An ANOVA (alpha = .05) was conducted to determine if the mean scores on the two sub-scales were statistically different for the classes. Results revealed that differences in scores on the Willingness sub-scale were not statistically significant, $F(7,105) = .975$, $p = .454$. However, differences on the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale were statistically significant, $F(7,105) = 3.173$, $p = .004$.

Post hoc investigations were conducted to determine if the infusion class scored significantly higher than all the classes, or just some on the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale. Post hoc t-tests were conducted with Bonferroni adjustments to control the Type I error rate which increases with multiple tests. Results revealed that the multicultural infusion students' mean score on the culturally relevant factor was not significantly higher than the students whose instructors participated in the collaboration project. However the multicultural infusion class scored significantly higher on the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale than students whose instructors did not participate in the collaborative research project. There were no significant differences between the collaborative project instructors and the non collaborative instructors on the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale.

Discussion

Results of this research suggest that infusion of multiculturalism can have a positive impact on preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching African American students. Although differences on the Willingness sub-scale did not reach statistical significance, the fact that the infusion class obtained the highest scores on the sub-scale has practical significance. The statistically significant higher scores on the Cultural Sensitivity sub-scale by the infusion class

further supports the assertion that infusion of multiculturalism can have a positive impact on preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching African American students.

Although the results of this research are encouraging, limitations of the research should be considered as a critical analysis and guide for future research. There was no experimental design for the way classes were taught, with the exception of the infusion class that was taught by the researcher. Therefore, information about the precise teaching methods of the other seven instructors was limited. Moreover, there was no pre / post assessment of students. Consequently, results could be confounded by teaching methods or a pre-existing sensitivity toward African Americans. Furthermore, the instrument used to assess preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching African American students was a new instrument, which investigations of reliability and validity were pending at the time of this research (Bakari, 1999).

Beyond limitations, this research makes a significant contribution to multicultural teacher education. It provides insight into how multicultural teacher education could infuse multiculturalism into curriculum as well as evaluate the impact on preservice teachers.

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